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ABSTRACT

The Academic Senate of the California Community Colleges created this document in 2001. Its goal is to measure the degree of use, effectiveness, and acceptance of the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC). The study was completed through three different questionnaires: (1) one was distributed to recent community college transfer students preparing to graduate; (2) another was distributed to professional guidance faculty in the California Community College System; and (3) the last one was given to the chief student services administrators at each of the California Community Colleges. The study had a 10% response rate. The study concluded that the IGETC pattern of lower-division general education requirements is well known to community college transfer students and it would become even more popular with an extended effort at community colleges and four-year colleges and universities to inform students of their about the program. If more students knew of the benefits that they would gain IGETC pattern then it would increase the number of students that utilized it and benefited from it. Those students that knew of the IGETC pattern viewed it as a flexible alternative that maximizes the student's options more than any other available program. (MZ)

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Evaluation of the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum by Community College Transfer Students and Community College Counseling Faculty

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Note: This study was conducted by the Academic Senate for the California Community Colleges at the direction of the Intersegmental Committee of Academic Senates (ICAS). The project was funded through an Intersegmental Joint Faculty Project (IJFP) grant provided by the California Community Colleges. The final report, a variety of tables and charts, and the data file are on file at the Academic Senate Office.

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Evaluation of the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC) by Community College Transfer Students and Community College Counseling Faculty

Abstract

The purpose of this study, undertaken by the Academic Senate of the California Community Colleges, was to assess the degree of use, effectiveness, and acceptance of the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC). The study was conducted by means of three questionnaires, one distributed to recent community college transfer students preparing to graduate, a second distributed to professional guidance faculty in the California Community College System, and a third to the chief student services administrators at each of the California community colleges. It was concluded that the IGETC pattern of lower-division general education requirements is both well known to and popular among community college transfer students and would be even more so with a concerted and recurrent effort at the community colleges and the four-year college and universities to inform students of the option and its benefits. Transfer students tend to perceive the IGETC pattern as a flexible alternative maximizing their options, more so than with any other available option.

Methodology Of The Study

The study was conducted by means of three questionnaires, one distributed to recent community college transfer students currently preparing to graduate from a campus of the University of California or the California State University System, a second distributed to professional guidance faculty in the California Community College System, and a third to the chief student services administrators at each of the California community colleges. Each survey was aimed at its respective audience in an effort to evaluate satisfaction with the IGETC option from a variety of perspectives, and was evaluated and approved by an intersegmental advisory committee responsible for identifying the data to be collected. Once approved, each of the three surveys was posted at a protected Internet site. Participants were then notified of the addresses, provided with passwords, and invited to complete and submit the on-line survey. Qualified student participants were defined as active UC and CSU students who had transferred in the fall of 1997 to their university campuses from a California community college and were scheduled to graduate during the 1998-1999 academic year. Qualified California Community College staff members included all counseling and guidance faculty at all of the community colleges, and 105 chief student services administrators, one from each of the colleges.

Student Respondents

The total qualified student population was 28,000, of which 20,000 were CSU and 8.000 UC students. Of this group, 2082 students completed and submitted the survey, approximately 10% of the total qualified population. This population of student respondents included transfer students from each of the 105 community colleges and each of the UC and CSU campuses, with the largest number of the former being transfers from De Anza College (92), and of the latter being students currently attending UCLA (153) and CSU San Jose (233). The mean participation rate per college was 20 for the California community colleges, 73 for CSU campuses, and 77 for UC campuses. Low rates of participation relative to cohorts were recorded for only one (1) UC and two (2) CSU campuses. Of the community colleges, one-third (35) was represented by 25 or more students from each of the colleges while another third were represented by fewer than ten students from each.

Guidance Faculty Respondents

Three hundred thirty-two (332) valid surveys were submitted by professional community college guidance faculty, a population estimated to represent at least one-third of the statewide total. Of this number, 76% (258) reported five or more years of experience advising community college students. A similar percentage reported that the majority of students they counseled were transfer students.

Chief Student Service Administrator Respondents

Fewer than 8% of the qualified respondents (19 of 105) participated in the survey. Given the relatively small size of the group and the low rates of participation, views of this group have been excluded from the current study.

Validity Of Population Sample

Because One Important Goal Of The Study Was To Afford An Opportunity For Participation By All Those Defined As Qualified Respondents, And Because The Proportion Of Transfer Students Relative To The Total Student Population (In College credit classes) differs significantly across

the 105 community colleges in the state, no deliberate effort was made in this study to insure that actual participants would reflect a statistically valid (random) sampling of the larger group, except insofar as each qualified respondent was afforded an equal and unbiased opportunity to participate. That the distribution of respondents tended to reflect the general distribution of transfer students is indicated by the close alignment between the proportion of UC and CSU respondents to the survey and the proportion of transfer students enrolled in each of the four-year systems. In addition, community colleges with historically and relatively high transfer rates reliably produced numbers of respondents greater than would have been expected by a simple extrapolation from mean statewide data, as was the reverse for community colleges with historically and relatively low transfer rates. Thus the population data reasonably suggest that the experiences and views of the respondents (a substantial number of community college transfer students and professional guidance faculty from community colleges across the state) may be taken as typical. However, a definitive study would require identification and isolation of a sample population not attempted in this effort at evaluation.

Summary Of Findings

The data reveal that the IGETC pattern of lower-division general education requirements is both well known to and popular among community college transfer students and would be even more so with a concerted and recurrent effort at the community colleges and the four-year college and universities to inform students of the option and its benefits. Transfer students tend to perceive the IGETC pattern as a flexible alternative maximizing their options, and not as an alternative uniquely suitable only for UC students and indicate a high degree of satisfaction with the alternative--more so than with any other available option.

However, the lack of integration of UC and CSU lower-division general education standards means that students electing the IGETC option may find--absent informed guidance--that the choice imposes additional obligations on them should they decide to transfer to CSU. These obligations could be considerable. More aware of this fact than are the students, community college counseling faculty become more inclined to steer students away from the IGTEC option the more certain they become that a student will transfer to CSU.

Although strongly supportive of the IGETC alternative, community college counselors are inclined to believe that the option could and should be improved and that students would benefit were the IGETC pattern and the CSU General Education valuable, successful, and attractive addition to the transfer options available to community college students, and would be more so were its initial promise more completely fulfilled.

Selected Findings

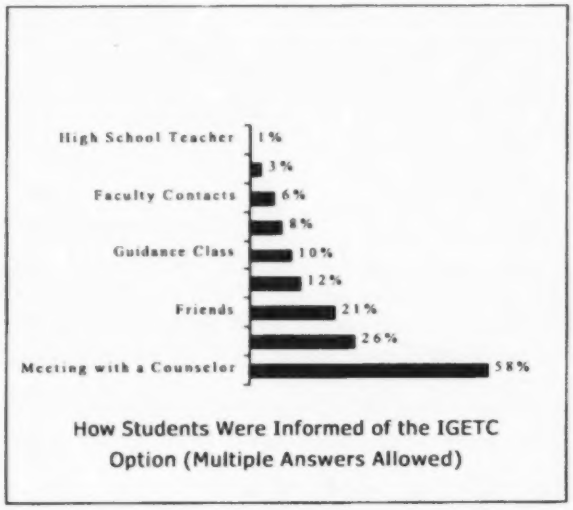
Students

Over 97% of the student respondents to the study reported that they had met with a community college counselor at least once during their attendance at a community college, and many stated that they had followed a specific general education transfer pattern at the community college. Nevertheless, about 1/3 of the students reported that they had *not* followed an educational plan developed with the assistance of a counselor or faculty advisor while attending community

college, and many of these students may have selected a general education pattern without the benefit of an educational plan developed with the assistance of a counselor.

Of 860 respondents who either did not follow any plan or otherwise elected not to follow the IGETC pattern, 67% reported that they were unaware of the IGETC option, even though 97% of all the student respondents (as noted above) indicated that they had met with a counselor during their community college years.

However, among the 71% of students who had followed an educational plan developed with the assistance of a counselor, 75% were aware of the IGETC option--true for 66% of students who did not follow a plan. Thus, although the absence of a student educational plan did not prevent students from following a defined transfer pattern, it did reduce student awareness of the IGETC pattern as an alternative. Since nearly 90% of the students who did follow the IGETC pattern stated they believed, in hindsight, that they had chosen the best option for lower-division general education requirements (a statement with which 70% of those who followed another pattern concurred), the data strongly suggest that transfer students at the community college would make even greater use of the IGETC pattern than they currently do were the colleges to insure that transfer students were made sufficiently aware of the alternative.



How Students Were Informed of the IGETC Option (Multiple Answers Allowed)

Students who did use the IGETC pattern reported various reasons for doing so. Although it is a common notion with some community college circles that the IGETC pattern is most suitable for students bound for the University of California, nearly half of the CSU students who responded to the survey reported that they had followed the IGETC pattern, and 39% of all the student respondents who used the IGETC option stated they had done so because they knew they were going to transfer to CSU, a percentage slightly greater than for students who knew they were going to transfer to UC. In addition, 90% of the students who elected to use the IGETC pattern reported that they had done so either to maximize their options or to assure completion of their lower-division requirements prior to transfer. Thus the idea that the IGETC option is seen by students as a "UC pattern" is supported by these data only insofar as CSU transfer students who followed the IGETC option at a community college are assumed to have done so because they hoped but were unable to attend UC. Since 20% of the students who chose to follow the IGETC option stated that they had made the choice because they were unsure of their transfer plans, the data suggest that students aware of the IGETC option do perceive it as the flexible alternative it was designed to be.

With respect to how those students aware of the IGETC option came to be so, 58%of the respondents who were aware of IGETC pointed to contact with a counselor, either in individual or group contexts. Information derived from college publications (26%), friends (21%), and

four-year colleges and universities (12%) constituted the large majority of the balance. Students reported that little or no information was provided by high school counselors or faculty members.

Of the student population that used the IGETC option, 60% reported that they encountered no barriers in the process, a percentage consistently higher than reported by students who used any of the other patterns or could not recall the pattern they used. Of those who did face obstacles in attempting to complete IGTEC requirements, 16% of the students observed that their community college scheduled the classes they needed only infrequently or at times that conflicted with their other obligations, while an additional 10% said that they were denied enrollment in required classes because the classes were filled. Perhaps of more concern, 25% of the transfer students who followed and completed the IGETC pattern found they had additional lower-division requirements to meet when they arrived at a UC or CSU campus. Since this result reflects both unmet major as well as well as general education requirements, it is not possible to determine from these data how completely the IGETC option satisfied lower-division general education requirements for those students who used it, but it may be inferred that some portion of the lower-division course requirements not met prior to transfer were in general education. If so, this would presumably speak to the incomplete and universal promise of the IGETC option as it was initially conceived. In fact, if the broadest and most fundamental purposes of the IGETC option are to provide a single, common, and obstacle-free path for community college students to meet lower-division general education requirements for any UC or CSU campus, and if the obstacles identified above are taken into account, only 35% of the total population of student respondents reported that they had followed the IGETC option and encountered no obstacles, a result indicating that much remains to be done to meet the ends of this option.

However, to put this finding in perspective, by the same measures only 13% of the student population reported that they had followed the CSU General Education List and had been able to do so without barriers. This fact strongly suggests that while the IGETC option is both well known to and preferred by community college transfer students, the post-secondary educational institutions have more to accomplish in realizing the promise of the alternative. Of note here is the fact that 20% of the students reported that the general education plan they selected did not meet all their lower-division transfer requirements, regardless of which plan it was. Thus community college students following a general education plan other than IGETC were much more likely to cite barriers at the community college (scheduling problems, or limited space) than were students following the IGETC pattern.

As previously observed, of the students who did not follow the IGETC pattern to complete their lower-division general education requirements, 10% reported that they had followed no plan at all. An additional 6% stated that they had not followed the IGETC option but could not recall exactly which other pattern they had used. If it is assumed of this latter group that their choice of patterns was proportionate to the choices made by those students who did recall the option they elected, then the data reveal that 89% of the community college transfer students met their lower-division general education requirements by means of one of the two "generic" options. Of this group, twice as many students elected the IGETC option as those who elected the CSU General Education Certification List, regardless of the four-year system to which they eventually transferred. Of the group that did elect to follow the CSU General Education Certification List,

only 186 students (18%) indicated that they had elected the CSU generic pattern over the IGETC option because that plan "offered a better fit to my educational plans." Moreover, a surprising total of 503 students (48%) who did not follow the IGETC pattern noted that they had done so because they "were not sufficiently aware of the option."

Although this group presumably includes a substantial portion of the 216 students who stated that they followed no plan at all, it must also include students who followed the generic CSU list without knowledge of the IGETC pattern as an alternative. These data suggest that, were community college transfer students fully informed of all the available alternatives, greater than 75% would elect the IGETC option regardless of their choice of transfer institutions. Bearing in mind that 73% of the student respondents were CSU students, but that less than 13% of this group elected to use the CSU General Education Certification List specifically because it fit their educational plans better than the alternatives, the data in this survey underscore the wide acceptance of and preference for the IGETC pattern among community college transfer students, and in particular once they have been adequately informed of the options available to them. As previously noted, eighty-nine percent of the students who did use the IGETC option felt, in hindsight, that they had chosen the best available pattern, an expression of satisfaction not attained by any of the other alternatives.

Community College Counselors

Among the 341 community college counselors who responded to the survey, 60% stated that they generally do recommend the IGETC pattern as the best available option for transfer students who could meet their educational objectives by a variety of general education patterns. However, 85% indicated that they recommend the pattern to students hoping to transfer either to UC or CSU, a percentage greater than that reported for students intending to transfer only to a UC campus (73%). Only 3% of the counselors stated that they made the same recommendation to students who intended to transfer only to a CSU campus, even though nearly half of the community college students who transferred to CSU used the IGETC option and expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their choice.

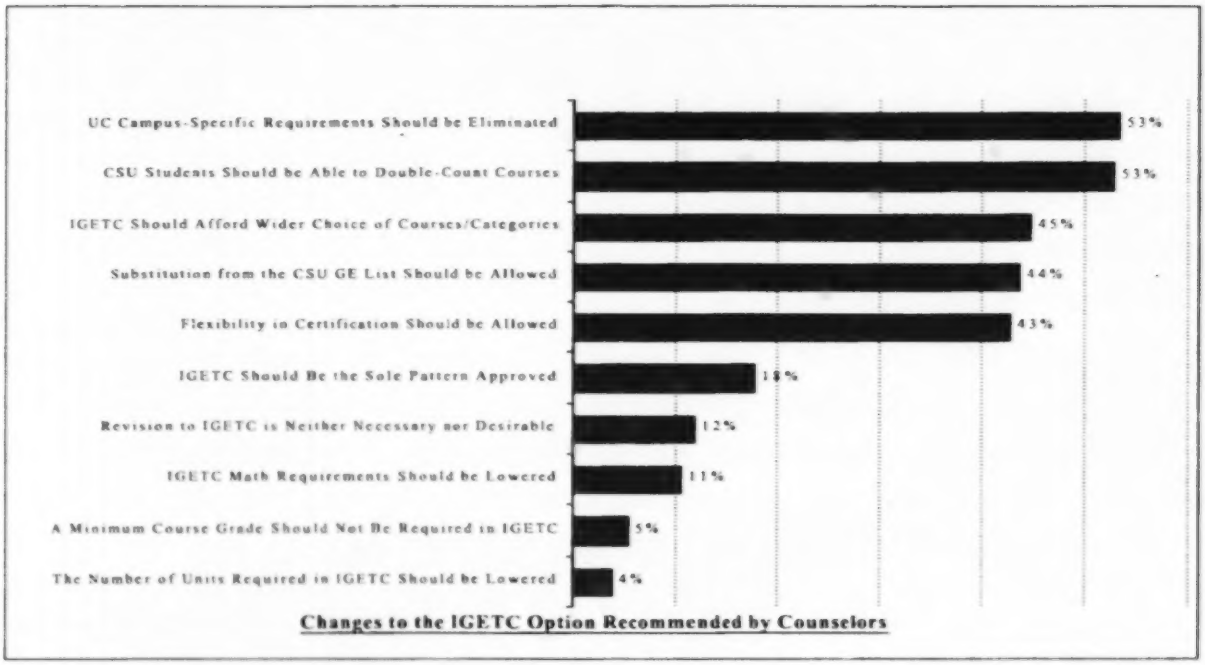
This sharp discrepancy (to the point of an apparent contradiction) illustrates clearly that the IGETC pattern is widely perceived by community college counselors to be inherently less appropriate and/or desirable for CSU transfer students than is the generic CSU General Education Certification List, except for circumstances in which the student has indicated that he or she may also wish to consider options other than CSU. In these latter cases, the counselors recommend the IGETC pattern at least 75% of the time. In this respect, contrast with the student data could hardly be more pronounced.

An indication for why this may be lies in the correlation counselors appear to draw between majors, student grade point average, and the suitability of the IGETC option for transfer students. Thirty percent of the responding counselors reported that they gave "careful consideration" to a student's GPA before recommending the IGETC general education option to that student. An additional 51% acknowledged that they gave the matter some, although not "significant" consideration. Thus only 19% of the counselors gave little or no consideration to student GPA in recommending the IGETC pattern to transfer students. This finding almost certainly illustrates a common view among community college counselors that students who will be unable or unlikely

to transfer to UC as a result of lower GPAs are better served by the CSU General Education Certification List than the IGETC pattern, even though both options are available to CSU transfer students. Thus, from the point of view of many community college counselors, the IGETC pattern tends to be seen rather as a generic UC option or the best option for students not certain of their transfer plans than as the "system-wide" option it was at least proposed to be. An initial analysis may suggest a process of circular reasoning whereby the fact that students who lack the necessary GPA cannot be admitted to UC is taken to be reason to counsel students away from the IGETC option unless they have the grades to attend UC. However, this reasoning disregards the extent to which the reflection of the counseling faculty takes into consideration the consequences a CSU transfer students faces if the IGETC option is chosen over the CSU General Education Course List --again, a result of the residual discrepancies between the two generic options. These include CSU requirements for speech, American history, and political science, and UC requirements for two years of study in a language other than English.

Since a student following the IGETC pattern may meet social science requirements without taking either American history or political science, and since a speech class is not required for UC students but a competency in a foreign language is, a CSU transfer student following the IGETC option will find fewer options and will face at least one and perhaps three additional courses, depending in part on the courses the student completed in high school. Thus, knowing that a student is certain that he or she intends to transfer to CSU, community college counselors are inclined to advise against the IGETC option; similarly, knowing that a student with a lower GPA is unlikely to be admitted to UC, counselors will advise CSU and, accordingly, the CSU General Education Course List. This in mind, what appears in the data to be a contradictory response from community college counseling faculty is most likely a consequence of the important discrepancies between the two available generic general education patterns.

Regarding majors, only 3% of the counselors noted that they gave no consideration to a student's choice of major in recommending the IGETC option for meeting lower-division general education requirements, and two-thirds indicated that they gave "careful consideration" to this matter. This result is consistent with the views of counselors regarding student grade point average (above) if it is assumed that counselors routinely associate student choice of major with a choice between UC and CSU. Knowing that the UC system is appropriate for certain majors and the CSU system for others, counselors advise students with "CSU majors" to prefer the CSU General Education Course List to the IGETC pattern if the student has decided against UC or has a grade point average that would preclude UC admission. Again, the responses from the counseling faculty indicate close familiarity with the distinctions between the available options, as well as guidance to students based on an evaluation of the student's plans and achievements. Although nearly three-quarters of the student respondents indicated that they were familiar with the IGETC option while attending community college, fewer than 28% of community college counselors agreed with that assessment of student knowledge, if "being familiar" in this case was taken as synonymous with "being sufficiently familiar to consider this pattern among available choices." Although community college counselors consider themselves well informed about the IGETC option (only 5 of 341 respondents stated that they were "uninformed" or "only vaguely informed"), they generally consider their transfer students to be poorly informed, 35% of the counselors holding the opinion that only one-third of their transfer students were sufficiently aware of the option, while another 37% felt that "about half" of their transfer students were


UC Campus-Specific Requirements Should be Eliminated
53%
CSU Students Should be Able to Double-Count Courses
53%
IGETC Should Afford Wider Choice of Courses/Categories
45%
Substitution from the CSU GE List Should be Allowed
44%
Flexibility in Certification Should be Allowed
43%
IGETC Should Be the Sole Pattern Approved
18%
Revision to IGETC is Neither Necessary nor Desirable
12%
IGETC Math Requirements Should be Lowered
11%
A Minimum Course Grade Should Not Be Required in IGETC
5%
The Number of Units Required in IGETC Should be Lowered
4%

Changes to the IGETC Option Recommended by Counselors

sufficiently aware. This difference in perception may be due to regional differences, given the lack of proximity of a UC campus to many community colleges (if so, it would not appear to correlate with student views, for which regionality appears to have little bearing on the matter. However, it may also reflect an understanding on the part of the counseling faculty that "sufficient awareness" of the IGETC option would include student awareness of its potential limitations and/or adverse consequences. Counselors noted that they were kept informed of IGETC in a wide variety of ways, over half the respondents citing dedicated publications ("IGETC Notes"), UC training sessions, instruction by colleagues, and "Ensure Transfer Success" workshops, and. another substantial portion citing college publications, CSU training sessions, and training sessions run by the community college system.

Regarding their views of the IGETC option itself, only 12% of the counselors professed satisfaction with the pattern as it currently stands. Among improvements proposed in the survey, counselors expressed little or no support for lowering competency standards in mathematics or reducing the overall number of units, or eliminating minimum course grade requirements. However, 43% did agree that community colleges should be allowed flexibility in certifying student completion of the package, while 44% felt that students should be able to avoid certain requirements in the IGETC pattern by substituting courses approved for the CSU General Education List.

Similarly, 45% of the counselors felt that the IGETC pattern was too narrow in terms of required categories and allowable courses, and 53% felt that CSU students should be allowed to double count courses where appropriate. Although only in the latter case did a majority of the responding counselors support a specific proposal for modification, the data indicate an established and consistent minority opinion among community college counselors that the

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current IGETC course requirements are overly restrictive with respect to course options and required categories of study. This finding must be tempered with the realization that course options within IGETC categories are submitted for UC acceptance by individual community colleges, which vary greatly in the breadth of course they are able to offer and are not of a single mind regarding the benefits of course diversification within required categories. Of note here is the fact that the counselors showed no support for a reduction in IGETC standards, and that although 88% of the counselors agreed that some modification to the IGETC pattern would improve the option, no specific modification proposed in the survey garnered support greater than 53%. These findings indicate that the sentiment in support of modification is only general or the result of local conditions at the community colleges, largely eroding in the face of any concrete recommendations for improvement.

Finally, only 18% of the responding counselors concur with the assertion that the IGETC pattern should become the single statewide method for transfer students to meet lower-division CSU and UC general education requirements, while 53% agree that the UC campuses should eliminate their campus-specific general education requirements, leaving the IGETC pattern the only option for UC students. Although majority support for the latter proposal is only modest, the strong sentiment expressed in opposition to the adoption of the IGETC option as the sole alternative for transfer students again indicates the propensity among community college counselors to view the CSU General Education List as more appropriate for CSU transfer students than the IGETC option, given its current definitions. Alternatively, counselors view the IGETC option as a welcome alternative for UC students who would otherwise be obliged to meet campus specific requirements without being assured of admission to the campus whose lower-division general education requirements they spent two years attempting to meet.

Thus the data consistently suggest that most community college counselors do not view the IGETC option in its current form as the generic system-wide transfer pattern it was proposed to be, but rather as the generic UC equivalent of the pre-existing CSU General Education Certification List. However, community college counselors also appear to concur that student satisfaction of IGETC requirements should also suffice to meet CSU general education requirements, a belief then used to justify both the continued necessity for a separate CSU General Education List and, curiously, support for relaxation of IGETC requirements toward a distribution of courses and categories approximating the generic CSU standards. These findings are likely the result of a prevailing sentiment among community college counseling faculty that the IGETC option, while providing a useful and important alternative for transfer students, falls significantly short of being a universal general education pattern, which remains to be developed.

Background Of The Study

In 1991, the University of California, the California State University System, and the California Community Colleges adopted a common set of course requirements, the completion of which at any community college would substantially satisfy lower-division general education requirements for any community college student transferring to any CSU or UC campus to complete a bachelor's degree program. This statewide, lower-division general education pattern was named the "Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum," for which the acronym IGETC became ubiquitous.

The IGETC pattern did not, and was not intended to, replace other general education patterns already approved and in use for students transferring to UC and CSU from the California Community Colleges--most notably the generic CSU General Education Certification List (shared by all CSU campuses), and the campus-specific general education requirements of each UC campus. Moreover, the initial intent--that the IGETC option would completely fulfill lower-division general education requirements for all community college transfer students to any UC or CSU campus--was not realized, since the two university systems were unable to a single transfer pattern common in all respects. Rather (and as a consequence), the IGETC pattern that was adopted offered community college transfer students an additional and potentially more flexible lower-division general education option that was more widely applicable than any of the others available.

Many community college transfer students begin post-secondary study uncertain of their eventual majors and/or unaware of which four-year colleges and universities offer programs in their field of interest. In addition, specific UC and CSU campuses cannot guarantee every community college transfer student admission to every upper-division program or even admission to the first campus of their choice. The IGETC option provided community college students and guidance professionals a means of insuring that voluntary or involuntary changes to a student's academic plans would minimize a loss of credit for lower-division general education classes previously completed. Thus, even though the IGETC option adopted in 1991 failed to achieve the "single transfer pattern" to which it initially aspired, those from all three post-secondary systems involved in its planning, development, and approval anticipated that IGTEC would be a popular as well as intelligent choice for general education alternatives among community college transfer students throughout the state--once the option was made widely known to students and guidance faculty.

The purpose of this study, undertaken by the Academic Senate of the California Community Colleges is to assess the degree of use, effectiveness, and acceptance of the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum eight years after its adoption and to identify the extent to which recent community college transfer students and professional guidance staff are satisfied with the option as it currently stands.

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